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ABSTRACT

Third of a 4-part longitudinal study examining the unfolding reading cognition of novice teachers, a study focused on seven teachers during their first year of teaching in elementary schools in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The teachers' reading beliefs and practices were identified using a variety of approaches including lesson plan review, informal discussions and a video or audio tape of classroom lessons or activities that the teacher felt exemplified his/her reading beliefs and practices. For five of the seven teachers, stated reading beliefs and actual practices were quite similar. Another teacher indicated that her current understanding of the reading process was "probably very warped" due to the context she found herself in as a teacher in an inner city school with limited resources. The other indicated that he did not have a reading philosophy because he had not been involved in the selection of the new reading program due to a change in position. The teachers also employed various aspects of the model developed as part of their preservice program to guide their decisions. Those teachers who viewed reading as a complex communication process with emphasis on meaning continued to do so, and the two teachers who viewed reading more as a process of decoding symbols continued to hold to this belief. (Contains 13 references.) (RS)

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TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES: DISSONANCE OR CONTEXTUAL REALITY?

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Reading cognition and/or reflection studies have focused on preservice teachers' understanding of reading instruction and reading strategies (Roehler et al., 1987; Herrman and Duffy, 1989; Roehler and Reinken, 1989; O'Brien and Stewart, 1990; Smith and Pape, 1991). Andrews (1990) used reflective inquiry to investigate theory building in methods courses. Gordon and Hunsberger (1990) concluded that preservice content area teachers' knowledge and beliefs about reading were influenced positively when the students reflected on reading issues through hands on activities and journal writing. Bednar (1991) found that preservice elementary/special education and secondary education majors were able to identify and reflect upon their developing reading process and practice knowledge when a series of reflective activities were used.

Although Herrmann and Sarracino (1991) noted some literacy cognition and reflective practice development, they reported generally less positive results with preservice groups who were emerged in a reflective literacy teaching experience. Bednar (1992) reported more encouraging results in a study of elementary and special education student-teachers who generally referred to use of a theoretical model to guide decisions in the classroom and were able to reflect about when and why they diverged from previously held beliefs about literacy related issues. Perhaps as Niemeyer and Moon (1992) concluded, preservice teacher development follows an "oscillating continuum" with a series of ups and downs.

This study is the third phase of a four part longitudinal study examining the unfolding reading cognition of novice teachers. Part one identified the reading process knowledge and practice beliefs of seventy junior level education majors; part two followed fifty of these students through their student teaching year. The current study focuses on seven of these students during their first year of teaching. Now that they are no longer "under the gun" to meet university or cooperating teacher expectations or demands and are on their own, how did they address literacy issues in the classroom? Did they use their professed reading process knowledge to guide their instruction and assessment practices? This study examined:

* first year teachers' reading beliefs and practices, and
* evolving reading beliefs and practices (from pre-service to in-service)

including use of a theoretical model to guide practice.

Procedures

Seven first year teachers, 1992 graduates from an urban university certified as both elementary education teachers and teachers of the mentally and physically handicapped, were included in this study. There were six female teachers and one male. They are employed as full-time contracted teachers in public, private and parochial schools in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Teaching assignments range from three regular education teachers (third, fourth and sixth grades), two learning support teachers (second-fourth grades and third-fourth grades), one special education teacher working with emotionally disturbed and learning disabled adolescents, and one special education teacher teaching secondary level students classified as perceptually impaired.

During their junior year, each of these students completed a required developmental reading course which focused on introducing and developing reflective inquiry practices and generating a "working" model of reading to guide classroom literacy practices. The course highlighted reading theory and instruction and assessment practices. Through a series of reflective writings and activities, each student's reading process knowledge and classroom practice beliefs were identified.

During the senior year student teaching experience, each student's use of a theoretical model to guide classroom literacy practices was identified. This was accomplished through a series of interactive and reflective measures including but not limited to submission of a "reflective reading packet" wherein the student-teacher critiqued and reflected upon video or audio taped reading lessons; supervisor scripts of observed lessons; formal observation documents, and student-teacher reflection writings about reading beliefs and practices.

The seven first year teachers' reading beliefs and practices were identified using a variety of approaches including lesson plan review, informal discussions and a video or audio tape of classroom lessons or activities that the teacher felt exemplified his/her reading beliefs and practices. In addition, the

teachers' reading beliefs and instruction practices were elicited more formally via a series of free response essays. In their essays the teachers presented their philosophy of reading, explained how they taught reading, and critiqued their areas of strength and weakness as related to their understanding of reading and reading instruction.

Analysis

First year teaching: Beliefs and practices

The data from the teachers' first year experiences were reviewed through a modification of constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This involved a series of repeated viewing or readings. Video/audio tapes were examined to identify instructional practices, e.g. demonstrating story mapping, assisting students to use summarizing, using a directed reading activity. These practices were compared to teachers' verbal and written reflections about their practices and to formal lesson plans. Reflective essays were read repeatedly to identify specific thought units pertaining to reading beliefs and practices. A thought unit for this paper is defined as a single concise statement. For example, "holistic," "emphasis on meaning" and "I believe reading crosses all subject areas." are each separate thought units. An external reader/rater familiar with both literacy and teacher cognition research examined all data using a second series of viewing and reading to identify practices, thought units and possible trends. Discussion ensued until 100% agreement was reached.

Were these first year teachers guided by the theoretical model introduced and developed as part of their pre-service instruction? Teacher use or reference to the components of what the junior level reading course referred to as the "Strategic Reading Model" - simply stated as the need to recognize how individual reader needs, task demands, specific goals or purposes, contextual demands, varying strategies to meet purposes, and monitoring of these, at times, conflicting variables affect the reader's ability to comprehend - was determined by examination of lesson plans, audio and video tapes, discussion notes and essays for specific reference or use of one or more elements. For example, a teacher's introduction of visualization in the video was considered to be evidence that the teacher was employing the strategy component of the model. In

a written response, "These children could have cared less about phonics or basals but they did care about driver's exams and job application" indicated that this teacher was aware of how the goal or purpose of the reading activity impacted the reader. Again, a second reader reviewed materials.

Across time: Beliefs and practices

The data from the three years was reviewed using the same procedure. For each of the seven participants, initial beliefs and practice views (1991), student-teacher beliefs and practices (1992), and first year beliefs and practices (1993) were analyzed first, to identify evolving reading cognition characteristics for each individual teacher and, second, to determine possible group trends.

Results

First year: Beliefs and practices

How did the experiences of their first year affect the beliefs and practices of these novice teachers? What did they now profess as a guiding reading philosophy and how did this align with their previous beliefs and current practices? Although requested to present a formal philosophy of reading statement, the teachers had some difficulty and their statements were punctuated by illustrations from their practice. However, they each did present a clear idea of what they held to be important.

For five of the seven, stated reading beliefs and actual practices were quite similar. These teachers portrayed reading as a "holistic, complex process" with "emphasis on reading for meaning." In addition, they indicated that reading is part of the "communication process and hand-in-hand with writing, speaking, listening." In addition, these teachers cited the need to address individual differences when developing literacy.

Two of the seven, however, presented quite different perspectives. One clearly indicated that her current understanding of the reading process was "probably very warped" due to the context she found herself in as a teacher in an inner city school with limited resources and support. She presented "reading

is reading words but not always understanding what is read." The other indicated that he didn't have a reading philosophy because he hadn't been involved in the selection of the new reading program due to a change in position -- "While changing districts, I also changed philosophy of reading."

As first year teachers, the seven each indicated that they used a variety of instructional practices. These included DRTA, KWL, Reciprocal Teaching, and cognitive mapping. Six of the seven indicated/showed that they were relatively comfortable with modifying an instructional technique to reach their students. In addition, the teachers were focused when analyzing the effectiveness of instructional techniques and assessment approaches that had been presented during their pre-service instruction. As one teacher indicated, "In content reading, the technique I use most is KWL. I find the previous knowledge aspect the most effective for stimulating background knowledge and discussion. It is time consuming to keep updating the 'what we have learned' aspect. Also more often than not what the students want to know is not found in the course material and is not always easily available." Another stated, "On the KWL they all understood what each part was meant to do, but some of my almost non-reading fifteen-year-olds felt that there was nothing they wanted to learn."

Evidence of theoretical model

Did the theoretical model developed as part of their pre-service program surface as an underlying framework upon which these teachers based practices? In their reflective essays, the teachers referred to at least one or more of the model's variables. Additional support was found in videos and lesson plans. The model basically presented reading as a complex process affected by a multitude of interacting variables included but not limited to the learner, the text or task, the goal or purposes, the context, the strategies or tools available to the reader. Metacognition provides the central core to orchestrate changes or modification needed among the variables to meet specific variable demands.

These first year teachers employed varying aspects of the model to guide their decisions:

* Three teachers demonstrated that they used all aspects of the model to guide their practices.
* Seven teachers assessed and adjusted instruction to address

individual learner needs. This included the one teacher who did not demonstrate or refer to any other theoretical model component.

* Six teachers used a strategy based approach to teaching reading regardless of his/her school's reading program. The teachers introduced and developed a range of reading strategies using both narrative and expository materials. These strategies included prediction, visualization, self-questioning, summarizing, text structure awareness with narrative story grammar and expository comparison-contrast, decoding, and monitoring.
* Four demonstrated varying instruction based upon text factors.
* Three demonstrated how varying purposes and goals affected their reading instruction.
* Three demonstrated changing instruction due to contextual issues.

First year: Additional themes

An examination of all materials suggested several additional themes shared by the seven first year teachers. These included:

1. The teachers believe that reading should transcend the forty-five or sixty minutes allocated to reading class and demonstrated how they continued to build reading awareness throughout the day. This included using literacy opportunities during math lessons as well as social studies and science lessons.
2. The teachers appeared to be comfortable analyzing their own reading knowledge base. They were all able to define their specific area of concern and how they were proceeding to resolve their concerns. Generally these areas were related to their current grade assignment and/or specific learner needs related to reading.

Across time: Evolving beliefs and practices?

The data for five of the seven teachers indicated that their understanding about reading remained relatively constant from pre-service through their first year teaching. However, they develop more depth of understanding by affixing additional information to their initial cognition. Two cases illustrate:

At the conclusion of her junior level reading course, Allison had

indicated "reading is an active process wherein one must use metacognitive abilities to help one to understand." She further indicated that "a teacher must use a variety of approaches to meet learner needs." She continued to hold these beliefs during her student teaching experience but added that reading should be "cross curricular" and "not just during the designated reading period." Her field supervisor concurred that Allison was very clear in helping her learners see the connections among all subjects presented during the class day. During her first year as a fourth grade teacher in a parochial school, Allison's practice remained consistent with her previously stated beliefs. She continued to address learner needs and used a variety of instructional approaches to meet these needs. She wrote that reading is a "holistic, complex process wherein the reader must be aware of what they want to know, and monitor what they do." Her reading and content lessons reflected her attempts to model and incorporate monitoring with her learners. In addition, she critiqued herself along these issues -- " Monitoring has been difficult for my students to comprehend. I find that modeling it in small doses and monitoring the students' progress increases their effectiveness..."

Similar to the first student described, even at the beginning of her reading course Lisa Jane indicated a strong belief about reading. She stressed "reading for meaning." By the end of the course she continued to emphasize reading as comprehending but added recognition of the varied factors which affect comprehension including "awareness of learner needs and knowing and using strategies when reading for different purposes". During her student teaching experience she adapted her instruction for learners and introduced a variety of strategies during her reading instruction. She added two additional dimensions --"reading must be cross-curricular" and her personal goal "to develop independent readers." Her lessons and reflective essays verify that she continues to hold these beliefs as a third grade teacher. She is aware of her beliefs and stated that she continues to "directly instruct students in the use of a variety of reading strategies which they can use as tools." A review of her lessons reveal that she does, indeed, modify instruction to meet individual needs and develops reading issues, in particular, strategy use

using a before-during-after lesson model.

One teacher indicated that she was really unable to use any of the theoretical model developed during her pre-service instruction and experiences. Although she felt this to be true, when her practices were reviewed it was evident that she did, in fact, apply many of the features that are inherent in the model proposed in her course. In addition, a review of her three years indicates that she has been consistent in having difficulty reconciling her beliefs with her actual practices.

Judy had indicated on the first day of her junior reading course that "I know reading is more than reading the words but I am not sure how to move beyond this view." She repeated a similar phrase on the final day of the course. During her student teaching experiences she continued to express personal confusion related to this issue -- " Reading is more than decoding. It involves comprehension and understanding. A child may be able to read a sentence but not understand what they read. I am confused as to how to go about doing this. I know all the appropriate approaches and techniques but ...." It was interesting to note that during this experience Judy acknowledged considerable professional dissatisfaction about her cooperating teacher's bottom-up approach to reading. Judy herself attempted to employ a more interactive approach with the seven to nine year olds in her learning support classroom. As a sixth grade elementary teacher, Judy's beliefs and practices have remained consistent with her earlier experiences. In an inner city school with no textbooks for some of her classes, Judy is teaching students whose "comprehension skills are minimal, lot of the students are below reading level and reading is a struggle." She described her reading philosophy from her students' point of view -- "Reading is reading words but not always understanding what I read. It is probably also decoding words incorrectly because I do not have the skills to use context to help me get meaning. Reading is a chore and rarely done for pleasure." However, Judy still attempted to teach reading by applying, where she could, many aspects of her pre-service program. Faced with no social studies text, she used the

newspaper. When her first DRTA failed because so many of the students couldn't read the materials, she "didn't give up" but used teacher reading, choral reading and paired reading still within the parameters of a DRTA. She attempted to give the students strategies to use independently and was successful with cognitive mapping - "to my delight they began to use it on their own". Contrary to what appears to be some successes but very much consistent with her earlier beliefs, her self-analysis indicated that she feels she needs more information about "basic decoding skills to really understand reading and reading instruction."

In a similar fashion, the one male teacher appeared to attach more value to his pre-course and experience understanding about reading than he did to newly presented or, at least, less familiar views.

At the beginning of his reading course Bill indicated that reading was "interpreting symbols." By the end of the course he added that reading was "more than identifying symbols. One needs to go through a series of identifying words to reach comprehension." During his student teaching experiences he continued to teach reading using a text-driven model with considerable emphasis on decoding and limited focus on reading for meaning. Now as a first year teacher, Bill indicated "comprehension comes after decoding. You need to decode symbols and associate meaning based upon experiences." He also indicated that he felt his philosophy of reading should be derived from whatever the district uses as their reading program. It is interesting to note that he does add that reading is "a life skill and should be taught across the curriculum."

Discussion and Conclusion

This study attempted to examine the reading beliefs and practices that seven first year teachers hold. In addition, it attempted to trace their reading cognition development from their junior year reading course through student teaching to their first year as a teacher. Specifically the goal was to examine change in reading cognition after students were exposed to specific reading theory, principles and practices geared to encourage reflection. Herrman and

Sarracino (1992) cite the need for teachers to be able to think for themselves about literacy issues. The more comfortable and knowledgeable teachers are about their discipline, the more they may be able to make decisions in the field. Through each phase of their development the participants in this three year study were encouraged to understand reading as a dynamic cognitive enterprise. In addition, during their pre-service instruction they were given active modeling and practice in reflecting about their literacy beliefs and practices. They were encouraged to make instructional decisions based upon reflection and use theory to guide this reflection.

It was expected or, at least hoped, that these first year teachers used the pre-service emphasis on reading as a strategic dynamic process first, to define their pre-service and then clarify in-service reading beliefs and instruction principles, and, second, to use these beliefs to help them make decision in the classroom. For at least six of the teachers in this study, this held true. They used some, if not all, of the theoretical principles presented in their coursework to guide them. Even when they professed uncertainty in expressing their reading philosophy in a formal statement, they still utilized parts of the theoretical model that they had build during their course. The case summaries presented for this study provides only a "window" to view how first teachers may use a pre-service course generated reading theory or model to guide practice.

The seven teachers in this study were self-selected. Fifteen students randomly selected who had participated in the two previous studies were contacted and asked to continue with the investigation through their first year of teaching. Eleven replied positively but documentation for seven only was complete. Even though this may suggest that only teachers experiencing a "good" first year agreed to participate, this was not the case. The teachers freely indicated where and when they were struggling . These first year teachers reported mistakes as well as successes. Several indicated that they wanted to participate because it gave them an opportunity to continue working on reading instruction issues with which they were uncomfortable.

Was there a change in reading cognition over time? Yes and no! For the most part where they started was the deciding factor. Those students who already

viewed reading as a complex communication process with an emphasis on meaning continued to do so. This initial view made sense to them, was comfortable and was reaffirmed through course work, student teaching experiences and first year teaching experiences.

The two students who viewed reading more as process of decoding symbols continued to hold to this belief even when instruction and experiences indicated that reading is clearly more. For one teacher, her expressed beliefs about reading appeared to be in a state of flux. Although intellectually she accepted reading as more than decoding words, she was unable to change her mindset. Her state of dissonance was demonstrated how she taught reading in the classroom versus what she professed to believe about the reading process. For the other, his statements about reading with a defined decoding emphasis concurred with his daily practices. Alternative views were momentarily accepted and then rejected for what appears to be the next authority -- this time the school district.

If the pre-service teacher's beliefs about reading, formulated when they were young readers and probably based upon their elementary school teachers, become the basis for their "professional" belief, how much change does a pre-service reading course or program have on the beliefs and practices of the novice teacher? From this study is appears that even if inherent beliefs about reading do not change radically, there is evidence to suggest that reading cognition does evolve by a process of layering additional yet confirming information. The question is whether this "layering" either enhances an understanding of reading as multi-dimensional and interactive or continues to layer confirmation to reaffirm that reading is a simplistic and passive process.

How does one change a learner's very closely held belief system about reading when course work and experiences engineered to do so are not successful? Perhaps one way to investigate this is to compare what young readers indicate they know/feel about reading to what they experience in the classroom while at the same time query their teachers about their reading beliefs and how these affect their practices with these same learners. This may provide startling information and a starting point for recognizing where and how learners begin to crystalize their own beliefs or adopt other's beliefs which they bring into the

pre-service program.

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